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PUPIL.



An Address

*delivered before the Provincial Sunday School Convention,
Montreal, January 30th, 1890.*

BY

AL D. H. MACVICAR, D.D. LL.D.,
PRESBYTERIAN COLLEGE, MONTREAL.

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PREFATORY NOTE.

No Report of the Provincial Convention of January last, has been published, except what appeared at the time in the daily papers. We have deemed the following address of such special value, that we now place it in the present form within reach of Sunday School Teachers and others.

GEORGE BISHOP,

*Superintendent Mountain Street Church,
Methodist Sunday School, Montreal.*

W. DRYSDALE,

*Superintendent Stanley Street,
Presbyterian Sunday School, Montreal.*

FEBRUARY, 1890.

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The Teacher re-produced in the Pupil.

*By Principal D. H. MacVICAR, D.D., LL. D.,
Presbyterian College, Montreal.*

I solicit consideration of this:—

1. *As a fact.*—What you are yourself your pupil gradually becomes, a very serious matter both to you and to him. All the relations of life are infinitely serious and fraught with momentous issues. We mingle in social intercourse, and life and death are the outcome of our doing so, for God says "evil communications corrupt good manners." We see this terribly verified where unsuspecting young persons are drawn into haunts where the wicked are supreme. It is equally true, and blessed be God for the law of his kingdom which makes it a truth, that strong intellectual and spiritual natures impress themselves upon others. If vice is contagious, virtue is undoubtedly so. If man is naturally qualified and disposed to disseminate evil, he can, by grace, attain and wield the power to propagate good. He can sow to the spirit as well as to the flesh. If, for example, as a godly and devoted teacher, you are successful in your work the very lineaments of your soul are being stamped more or less accurately upon your pupil. He is the index or exponent of your thinking, of your spiritual activity and intensity.

The medium upon which you thus work may be dull and comparatively unimpressible, or it may be highly sensitive and receptive, and hence, without any special fault or merit on your part, your image may reappear obscurely or vividly, all imperfect and blurred or accurate and clearly defined. But reappear it must in some form. You are to have immortality in your pupils. They will speak of you when you are gone, and speak and act under the controlling power of your teaching without being conscious of it, or being able to distinguish it from what they may claim to be the product of their own minds. They will be the mirrors, the reporters of your failure or success, and well will it be with you if able to say in Apostolic words, "Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men, being made manifest that ye are an epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God."

This fact of the reproduction of the Teacher in the pupil is exemplified in the formation and history of great schools of Art, Poetry, Theology and Philosophy. The critical and almost the untrained eye can easily distinguish Italian Art from that which is French, German, or English. Each of these nations has had its great masters, and these have reappeared a thousand times in their admiring pupils.

So in Poetry, while commonly counted a divine gift, it cannot be denied that the vast majority of the votaries of the muses sing as they are taught by loftier spirits.

Theologians follow their leaders. Great masters in Israel like Augustine, Calvin, Arminius and Luther leave their impress upon generations of feebler thinkers.

Philosophers are no exception to this rule. They may theoretically assert absolute independence of thought; and each one who appears in an essay or voluminous treatise may promise to show the world truth never before disclosed, yet, when closely searched, what they are least remarkable for is originality. Their utterances are the echoes of the near or distant past. Take but one example.

God sent Socrates into the world endowed with amazing power of thought, and while he founded no college, and presided over no great university, yet as a teacher, he so reproduced himself in his pupils that after the lapse of more than two thousand three hundred years they have not ceased to speak of the Socratic Philosophy. And so in numerous other well known instances, Plato, Hegel, Kant, Hume and Hamilton might be mentioned.

But high above all teachers stands the one who spake as never man spake—the perfect one—who is the pattern and guide of all true Sunday School workers. They cannot improve upon his methods. Their business and wisdom is to understand and follow them. Having in himself the fulness of the Godhead, and having come to teach our whole race, he is represented in and by his pupils in all ages and countries of the world, and will be

seen in them to the end, and throughout eternity, for the ecclesia, the assembly, the Church or company of those whom he shall at last have effectually taught are to continue forever to be his very body. "The fulness of Him who filleth all in all."

The fact that the teacher reappears in his pupil is very generally acknowledged, and is made much of in educational circles. On this principle parents select the institutions in which they place their children for training and culture, and it is usual to speak of a person as well educated because he bears the imprimatur of a certain school. Witness the importance which a young man attaches to the fact of his being a graduate of Oxford, Cambridge, Edinburgh, Harvard or Yale, and he is supported in his belief by a widespread public opinion. He regards himself as the embodiment of the Spirit and the learning of his *Alma Mater*, and he is so far right, making all due allowance for the very common danger of exaggeration as to the extent to which this embodiment has taken place. It may be conceded, with necessary limitations, that the strength and the weakness of a teaching staff can be more or less distinctly discerned in the conduct and character of those who pass through their hands. "By their fruits ye shall know them." Hence the state of the classes is the best practical test of the efficiency of Sunday School teachers. There are, of course, exceptions to this rule for which full allowance must be made. The power of

the very best teacher to stamp himself upon his pupil may be largely neutralized by noisy surroundings and lack of isolation where he is called to do his work. Then there are wayward persons, old and young, of limited capacity, and abundant dullness and stubbornness. Persons whose natures are not plastic, but hard and rigid, and incapable, especially because of overweening conceit, of being moulded to any considerable extent. But this is not commonly the case in childhood, at the time we have to deal with pupils, it is rather true in manhood. Then, indeed, it must be acknowledged that in some instances the very best teacher may fail to reproduce himself in his pupil. For example. Judas Iscariot entered the training class of Jesus Christ as a thief, and although he listened to the lessons of his Master against serving Mammon and as to the sin and danger of inordinate desire for riches, he closed his three years' course in the best college ever instituted, without being cured of his over-mastering vice. The teacher and the lessons were not at fault, they were most impressive and successful in the case of eleven out of twelve students. So much so that when Ananias, the High Priest, and his distinguished associates saw the boldness of Peter and John as they stood before them, and "perceived that they were ignorant and unlearned men"—according to their standard of learning—"they marvelled and took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus." The clearness, courage and convincing power

with which they uttered their views, and the spirit which governed them brought forcibly to the mind of the Council the Great Master by whom they were taught. They saw in Peter and John a reproduction, a *fac simile*, shall I say, however imperfect, of that unequalled teacher sent from God—as all teachers should be,—who was constantly followed by multitudes.

II.—*The rationale of the fact.*

The question now is by what principles or laws does it happen that the teacher reappears in the pupil? We answer (1) *The dominant thought or passion in the instructor lays hold upon and pervades his class.*

They are all affected in degree as he is himself. This is specially the case in teaching spiritual lessons. The sincerity and intensity of conviction with which the truth is held by the Teacher, is in some measure communicated to the pupils. Just as when one string upon a harp or violin is made to vibrate forcibly all the rest are moved in sympathy with it. Thus it is that a hearty burst of laughter carries a whole houseful into a similar state of mirth. A sudden rush of anger from one heart quickly spreads among hundreds. A piercing wail of sorrow issuing from a desolate broken heart often moves to tears those it reaches. When the perfect man stood by the grave of Lazarus and saw the two sisters of the deceased sobbing with grief “Jesus wept.” This is not an incidental occurrence, but an illustration of the law of our common humanity. The call to strike and to resist

oppression, uttered by the leader in tones of determined courage, has inspired a whole army with the spirit of victory. Thus *all* experience more or less what is originated and propagated by *one*. This same law, be it remembered, is true in relation to our intellectual activity as well as our emotional nature. And as already hinted the depth and permanence of the experiences we cause others to have are determined by the vividness and intensity of our own mental activity. What I mean is this, when in teaching you are so controlled and absorbed by one over-mastering thought that all others are necessarily excluded, and the entire force of your spiritual nature is so concentrated upon it that you can truly say—"This one thing I do"—that thought is sure to become the mental property of your pupil, to enter into his very being. This law acts to a great extent irrespective of the subject matter of what is being taught. It may be Geography or Geometry, History or the eternal verities of Christianity. If the soul of the Teacher is burning with intense concentrated enthusiasm over the matter in hand, whatever it may be, he will lay the truth thus apprehended upon the mind of his pupil with such transforming power as to throw him for the time being into a precisely similar condition to his own. When this is the case, success is achieved—the work of teaching is really done. But failing to be thus borne along by a strongly dominant purpose or thought, which should always be the central or ruling thought of the lesson in the case of the

Sunday School Teacher, his work is largely lost, and he but feebly and obscurely reappears in his pupil. Deservedly so, too, because he is lacking in one of the prime elements essential to success.

(2.) *Our passive states of mind grow weak by repetition.*—It is necessary to explain and illustrate this law and to show how it acts in relation to the work of the Teacher.

Passive states are those induced by impressions made upon us through our bodily senses, and without any effort of will on our part. The more frequently they are experienced without any active exertion of our will-power, the feebler they become. For example. We witness a spectacle of deep distress and the impression made upon us the first time is strong and vivid, but we do nothing, exercise no volition to relieve the distress. Let this be repeated a sufficient number of times and the impression becomes so feeble as to be almost imperceptible. Our sensibilities are being slowly but surely deadened, or we are being hardened by the sight of distress.

Take as another illustration—the case of the medical student who enters the dissecting room for the first time. The impression made upon him by what he sees is deep and startling. He is shocked, but let him continue his visits, and pursue his work, in that same place of ghastly sights for several years, and the impressions made upon him become so enfeebled by repetition that he scarcely regards his surroundings as in any sense abnor-

mal. You see the working of this law. Look at another correlated law :

(3.) *Our active mental states are strengthened by repetition.*—Active states are those into which we pass by volition by the exercise of our innate will-power.

Look again at a case of unmistakable distress. By a deliberate act of will you overcome a feeling of disinclination to deal with it, and you put yourself about to afford relief. That is to say by an act of resolute choice, you turn to proper account the passive state into which you have been thrown by the sight of misery. You do so again, and again, ten, fifteen, twenty times. What is affirmed is that these repetitions give greater strength, a larger measure of ability to grant relief—such actions become easy and natural because a habit of virtue is gradually formed in the direction of benevolence, and thus you escape the serious danger of personal deterioration by having your feelings weakened and destroyed through frequent appeals to them without corresponding action on your part. It is under the action of these laws that the readers of sensational novels, and our theatre-going population inflict irreparable mischief upon themselves. Their emotional nature is stimulated to the last degree by exaggerated representations of imaginary woes over which they weep in their boxes and on their luxurious couches, while they do nothing to relieve suffering humanity at their doors. Practical action is wholly lacking with them. Their feelings are being worn out, so

that a stronger and still stronger stimulus is required to reach them. While no manly or womanly vigor is being gained by the cultivation of active habits of virtue.

But what has all this to do with teaching and with the teacher being reproduced in the pupil? Very much. These three laws namely,—that touching the diffusion of strongly dominant ideas, that under which our emotional nature may be weakened and virtually destroyed, and that by which we can gain mental strength, and rise to true manhood are all operative during the process of teaching, and success depends in a very large degree upon wise and skilful compliance with them. But this will be more apparent when we consider.—

III. *The opportunity and danger involved in this fact that the teacher is reproduced in the pupil,*

Generally speaking privilege and responsibility go hand in hand. It is obviously so in this case.

The teacher of spiritual truth has a grand opportunity of stamping his own character, views and convictions upon the minds of his pupils. Acting under the first law as to the propagation of dominant thoughts or desires, he may through the power of the Spirit of God, become to them, not only the instrument of instruction, but also of salvation.—How so?

Let me suppose that he is, first of all, earnestly bent upon the intellectual task, by means of correct logical arrangement, lucid statement and apt illustration to make the meaning of the lesson in hand clear, convincing and memorable.

This is a commendable aim, and when faithfully pursued usually results in holding a class together, whether junior or senior, and evoking their interest in the study of divine truth. But while thus intent upon the useful work of instruction, it is only a means to an end. He has one strong over-mastering desire in his heart that through this truth and the ministry of the Holy Spirit the members of his class may be led to trust in Jesus Christ for pardon and eternal life. This feeling is so constant and vehement in his heart that he cannot conceal it. It is seen in his countenance, heard in his voice, breathed in his prayers. Without perhaps making formal announcement of it, in various ways which it may be impossible to define, he convinces his pupils of the existence and the intensity of the desire. The feeling spreads among them, pervades their minds, or in other words, they respond to his dominant desire, and the result is that it rises to God as the united wish of all in the true spirit of prayer. What then? We are assured upon the highest authority that if two or three are agreed touching what they shall ask it shall be given them, and that "whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Do not doubt the possibility of making your pupils share your feeling in their behalf and thus drawing them after you into a praying attitude.—

Witness the power exercised through intense desire in behalf of others by the Apostle Paul. You recollect how he said to the Philippians, "I have you in my heart."

For God is my Witness how greatly I longed after you all in the tender mercies of Jesus Christ," and to the Galatians, "My little children of whom I am again in travail until Christ be formed in you." And this intense spiritual solicitation, this agony of soul, this ruling passion of his heart was so reciprocated by them that he declares, "I bear you witness that if possible ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me." So completely were they carried away by his travail of soul in their behalf. In another instance, you may remember, he relates that Priscilla and Aquila, his fellow-workers in Christ Jesus, for his life actually "laid down their own necks." And listen to what he says respecting his Jewish fellow-countrymen, "For I could wish that I myself were anathema from Christ for my brethren's sake, my kinsmen according to the flesh."

A man thus governed by one mighty irresistible desire could not help being influential for good among his countrymen, and far beyond them. And as a matter of fact he reproduced himself as to thought, energy, courage and conduct in Barnabas, and Apollos, and Timotheus, and Titus, and hundreds of men and women who caught the spiritual enthusiasm of their great teacher and leader. And thus it is in degree with every true teacher according to his ability, and in so far as the right spirit and aim are overwhelmingly dominant in him; but let the wrong spirit prevail, and inculcable mischief and ruin may be the result. Whether dealing with secular or sacred subjects

the teacher should rouse his pupils to the repeated exercise of active mental states and train them to think for themselves, that they may thus develop their faculties, and grow in intellectual, moral and spiritual strength. But here precisely we are upon the verge of danger of the most serious nature. Instead of aiming constantly, by wise forethought and preparation at awaking active mental states, the teacher may have his pupil almost habitually in a passive condition, or even in a state of active resistance, because not moving along the plane of child nature. He may deal boisterously with the child's nervous sensibilities by scolding, shouting, threatening and other methods of showing fidelity to professional duty. Forgetful all the while that the feelings will not stand to be handled roughly, and if approached in this fashion they will retreat and refuse to be dealt with. In accordance with the second law stated in another connection the longer this vicious course is pursued the feebler the impression becomes, and if persisted in for years, callousness and general mental imbecility are the results.

Thus it happens that a pupil of perhaps average brightness and intelligence degenerates into a first-class dunce. And usually, after having slowly and painfully passed through the deteriorating process by which the vivacity and freshness of childhood have been worn off, and the power of original thinking has been effectually crippled, the unhappy victim gets credit for having been a dunce from the beginning. This is an easy way of

explaining educational failures wholly from the one side. I do not say that Sunday School teachers often bring about such results. Perhaps they never do so, because half an hour of teaching per week amid the bustle of a large school is insufficient for the purpose. The evil can only be seen in matured form where the child is for six or eight years subjected daily to such wrong methods. Hence it is not a very uncommon thing to find boys who have been left very much to their own resources, who have escaped the technical grind of the schools, escaped the coercion of well-meant but most unwise training, come to the front in after life just because they have been free under the influence of natural environment to exercise thought instead of being treated as animated receptacles into which all sorts of stuff should be poured in the sacred name of education.

Finally, from this brief discussion of a single point in the philosophy of education, one or two inferences are apparent.

1. *The need of special training to qualify the teacher for his work.* This is happily conceded by the directors of secular, and, to an increasing extent, by the managers of Sunday Schools. It is not denied that good, and in some instances a very great amount of good, is done by those who have not enjoyed the advantages of such training. It is readily admitted, indeed, emphatically affirmed, that a renewed heart, and a mind illumined by the Holy Spirit and guided by his infinite wisdom are of

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inexpressibly greater value than all that Normal Classes and Teachers' Institutes can confer upon those who attend them. But how much better is it when natural ability and high spiritual qualifications are united with the skill which technical training imparts. The work of the Spirit of God is not hindered but helped by the superior intelligence and attainments of the devout teacher. There need be no antagonism between spiritual and educational competency. The deepest devotion in the service of God, the strongest desire to save souls, to honor the Spirit, and to exalt our blessed Redeemer may be found in minds of the highest culture and most profound and practical acquaintance with the science of education. And I feel confident that what the Superintendents of the Sunday Schools of our land need in order to increase the efficiency of their great work is a large army of such persons. We should therefore urge godly young men and young women to aspire to become distinguished by the thorough mastery of the laws and best methods of teaching.

2. *Teachers should always seek to be animated by the right spirit, and to have the right feeling, strongly dominant.* But how is this to be attained? I can only answer by hints or suggestions without elaboration. Cherish an habitual sense of the sacredness of your office and work, and of the mighty issues dependent upon it. We are working upon immortal spirits, making them

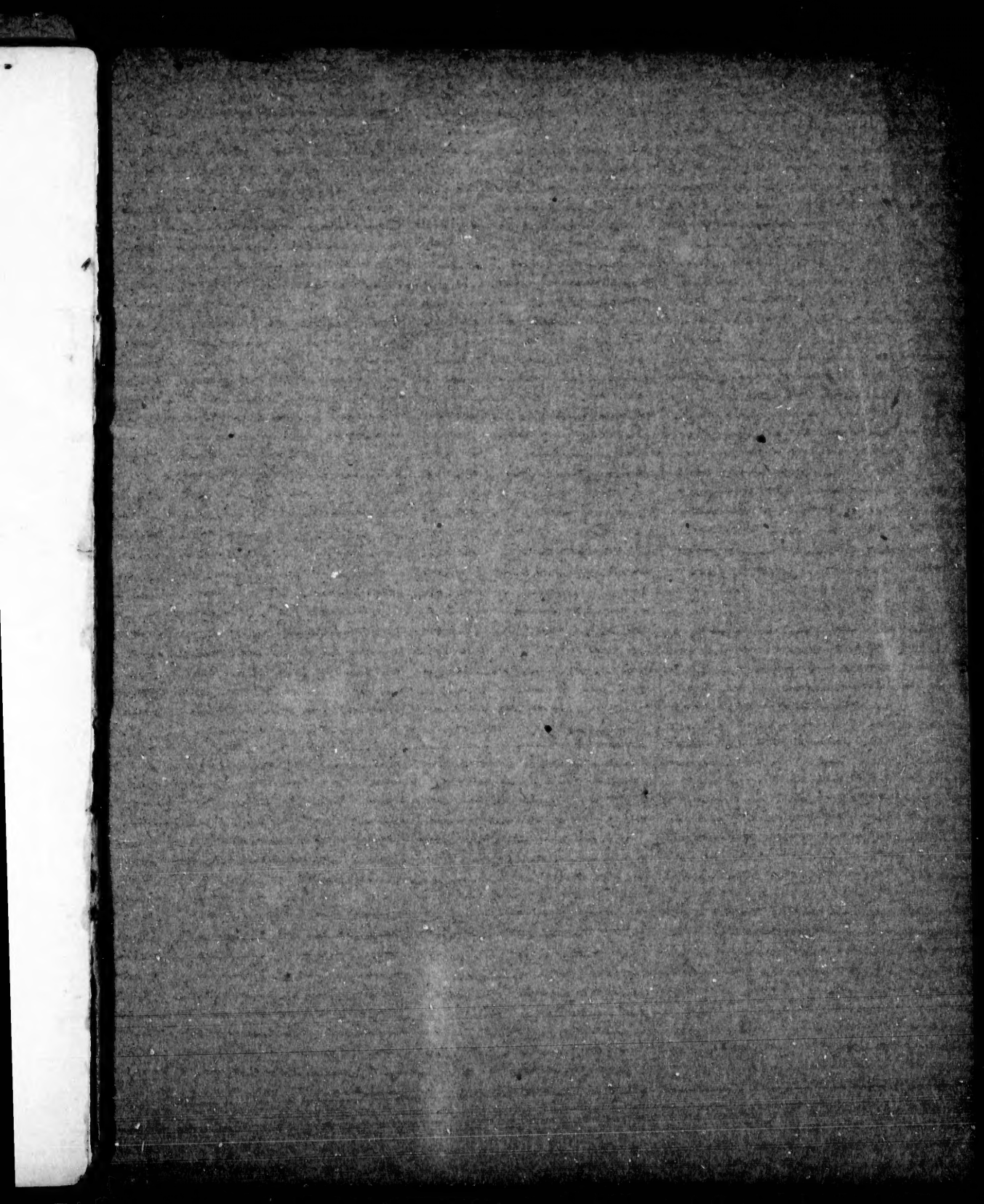
more or less like ourselves, moulding them for time and eternity. This is a most serious matter.

We, the teachers of the gospel, of God's message of love, are "a sweet savour of Christ unto God in them that are being saved, and in them that are perishing" that is, we represent Christ in the matter. We pray them, in Christ's stead, and thus become to the one "a saviour from death unto death: to the other a savour from life unto life."

We, not our message, or lesson, but *we* ourselves are this savour of life and death. "And who is sufficient for these things?" The question may well be asked, and let it have its full force upon our hearts and consciences that we may "Pray without ceasing," that we may be filled with all the fulness of God, that His Holy Spirit may be consciously our teacher, that enjoying this baptism of fire from on high, being thus acted upon we may have that love and vivid apprehension of truth, and that love of souls, and intense fervour of heart, which above all things qualify us to reproduce ourselves in our pupils to the glory of God and their eternal well-being.

"Earth's crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God."

But we need to have our eyes anointed with eye salve that we may see and teach these wonders.



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